

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 161

June 19, 1996, 2:30 p.m.
Page S-6447 Temp. Record

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/Reopening of Pennsylvania Avenue

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1997 . . . S. 1745. Reid motion to table the Grams/Robb amendment No. 4052.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE FAILED, 39-59

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 1745, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1997, will authorize a total of \$267.3 billion in budget authority for national defense programs (the President requested \$254.3 billion). In real terms, this bill will authorize \$5.6 billion less, and the President requested \$18.6 billion less, than was provided in fiscal year (FY) 1996.

The Grams/Robb amendment would express the sense of the Senate that the President should direct the Department of the Treasury and the Secret Service to work with the Government of the District of Columbia to develop a plan for the permanent reopening to vehicular traffic of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House in order to restore the Avenue to its original state and return it to the people.

During debate, Senator Reid moved to table the Grams amendment. The motion to table is not debatable. However, some debate preceded the making of the motion, and, by unanimous consent, some debate followed the making of the motion. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

NOTE: Following the failure of the motion to table, the amendment was further amended to provide that the plan that is adopted to reopen Pennsylvania Avenue should be certified by the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secret Service as protecting the security of the people who live and work in the White House. The amendment was then adopted by voice vote.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

The U.S. Senate should not take it upon itself to start handling security issues for the White House. The closing of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House has certainly caused some inconveniences for commuters, including for some Senators, but it was not closed by the President on a casual whim. President Clinton only closed off the street on the advice of the Department of

(See other side)

YEAS (39)			NAYS (59)			NOT VOTING (2)	
Republicans (7 or 13%)	Democrats (32 or 70%)		Republicans (45 or 87%)	Democrats (14 or 30%)		Republicans (1)	Democrats (1)
Cochran	Akaka	Inouye	Abraham	Inhofe	Bradley	D'Amato- ²	Bumpers- ²
Cohen	Baucus	Kennedy	Ashcroft	Jeffords	Breaux		
DeWine	Biden	Kohl	Bennett	Kempthorne	Bryan		
Gorton	Bingaman	Lautenberg	Bond	Kyl	Dodd		
Hutchison	Boxer	Levin	Brown	Lott	Dorgan		
Kassebaum	Byrd	Lieberman	Burns	Lugar	Graham		
Warner	Conrad	Moseley-Braun	Campbell	Mack	Johnston		
	Daschle	Murray	Chafee	McCain	Kerrey		
	Exon	Pell	Coats	McConnell	Kerry		
	Feingold	Pryor	Coverdell	Murkowski	Leahy		
	Feinstein	Reid	Craig	Nickles	Mikulski		
	Ford	Rockefeller	Domenici	Pressler	Moynihan		
	Glenn	Sarbanes	Faircloth	Roth	Nunn		
	Harkin	Simon	Frahm	Santorum	Robb		
	Heflin	Wellstone	Frist	Shelby			
	Hollings	Wyden	Gramm	Simpson			
			Grams	Smith			
			Grassley	Snowe			
			Gregg	Specter			
			Hatch	Stevens			
			Hatfield	Thomas			
			Helms	Thompson			
				Thurmond			
						EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:	
						1—Official Business	
						2—Necessarily Absent	
						3—Illness	
						4—Other	
						SYMBOLS:	
						AY—Announced Yea	
						AN—Announced Nay	
						PY—Paired Yea	
						PN—Paired Nay	

Compiled and written by the staff of the Republican Policy Committee—Larry E. Craig, Chairman

the Treasury and the Secret Service, which conducted a White House security review and found that keeping the street open posed a danger to the people who lived in, worked in, and visited the White House. Terrorist attacks in the United States are increasing, and the lethality of the weapons at terrorists' disposal is also on the rise. A car bomb such as the one used in Oklahoma City, for example, would cause extensive damage to the White House if it were detonated from Pennsylvania Avenue. It is this precise danger that caused the Treasury Department to recommend closing this street. No danger exists of a terrorist carrying such a bomb onto White House grounds--a vehicle is needed because of the size of bombs that can cause that much damage.

Closing off Pennsylvania Avenue has not caused any problems for tourists. They are able to visit the White House as freely as ever. In fact, it has benefitted them, by allowing them to visit in greater safety, and by giving them a new pedestrian area in front of the White House that was formerly clogged with traffic. The only people who have been inconvenienced, as we said at the outset, have been commuters. Which is more important--the convenience of commuters, or the safety of our President?

We should not even be discussing this issue. The country has many urgent problems to address, such as how high we should raise the minimum wage, and how we will provide universal health care. We should not be wasting our time discussing an issue that is of such little importance to the American people. Frankly, we see political motivations in this amendment. Our Republican colleagues are just trying to portray the President as a coward for closing off this street to traffic. The truth is that he was merely responding to the advice of his security experts. The President was right to listen to those experts. We therefore urge our colleagues to table the Grams/Robb amendment.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

Republicans and Democrats have come together in a bipartisan fashion on this amendment to ask the President to reverse a decision that has had widespread, unintended consequences. That decision was to close to traffic the 2-block stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue that runs in front of the White House. We understand that the street was closed for security concerns, but in a democracy those concerns need to be balanced against the need to have an open and free government. When Americans visit Washington, D.C., their first sight of the White House should not be of a distant building surrounded by barricades and armed guards. That House is theirs; it is not the compound of a third-world dictator.

President Clinton closed down this street in front of the White House right after the Oklahoma City bombing. As a temporary response, while it was decided if some new and urgent threat was posed, this action was acceptable. However, we cannot accept it as a permanent measure. We are confident that security measures can be worked out that will allow the reopening of Pennsylvania Avenue.

For the past 30 years the Secret Service has recommended the closing of Pennsylvania Avenue. Presidents Kennedy through Bush refused. They understood that being President entailed some risks. The Secret Service, if it could, would keep a President in a protective bubble, carefully insulated from all threats. Of course, if the President were that isolated from the people he would not be able to represent them well. President Clinton, like his predecessors, understands the need to have close contact with the people. In this one case he has made a very poor decision, and he should find a way of overturning it. Security measures can be taken without turning the White House into the White Fortress.

Our colleagues have grossly understated the disruption that this decision has caused, dismissing it as only a minor inconvenience for a few commuters. They do not mention that Pennsylvania Avenue is, or at least was, one of the main traffic arteries in one of the busiest cities in the world. The traffic disruption has been immense. Further, the District of Columbia Government has found that this severing of one of its major crosstown arteries has had a devastating impact on local businesses. Our colleagues also do not mention the hardship this decision has created for disabled and elderly tourists, who can no longer get close to the White House. For some Americans, walking a few blocks through police checkpoints is not an option.

This amendment has strong bipartisan support. It is supported by the D.C. Council and by D.C. businesses. Both former Presidents Ford and Carter have said that President Clinton made a mistake in blocking off Pennsylvania Avenue. We urge our colleagues to join us now in passing this amendment, in the hope that President Clinton will reconsider his decision.